

An Interview with

Sylvester Magee

July 31, 1969

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

Post Office Box 571

Jackson., Mississippi 39205

AU 1027 – SIDE 2

TR 102

Interviewee: Magee, Sylvester

Title: An interview with Sylvester Magee, July 31, 1969

MALE 1: We are now in Columbia, Mississippi. We're about ready to commence with an interview with the last veteran of the American Civil War, Sylvester Magee. The date is July 31st, 1969. Ok. Can you erase it?

MALE 1: We heard you fought for the North.

MAGEE: I go see the lady now.

MALE 1: Put it on the other way. Put the other way. We heard... We heard you fought for the North and we were looking all over for a Northern hat. All the stores in Vicksburg, Mississippi but we couldn't find one.

FEMALE: How are you feeling?

MAGEE: I feel pretty good this morning, Missy.

FEMALE: That's good.

MALE 1: We came to ask you a few questions and everything. We hear you like to have visitors.

MAGEE: [inaudible]

MALE 2: That's all right.

MALE 1: Let's see...

FEMALE: Do you mind if we take pictures of you?

MAGEE: Take all you want.

FEMALE: Oh, thank you.

MALE 1: Let's see. We've been looking for you for about two years now. We've been following you all over Mississippi, you go from Gulfport to Magnolia, I think. Hattiesburg. Inverness. We contacted Ike Durr up in Inverness.

MAGEE: Yes sir. Yes sir.

MALE 1: He's your nephew I think and finally we located you down here.

MAGEE: Yes sir. Yes sir. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I'd go to see the old boy. I haven't seen him in about 14 years. He might not [inaudible]

MALE 1: What, Ike? You haven't see Ike?

MAGEE: No. No. No sir.

MALE 1: Oh, boy. He said you were up visiting him recently. You stayed with him up in Inverness. Not too long ago.

MAGEE: Yes sir. [inaudible]

FEMALE: How you feeling, Sylvester?

MAGEE: I feel pretty good [inaudible]

FEMALE: Is that your grandson?

MALE 1: The man we were talking to on the phone yesterday?

FEMALE: How old are you now?

MAGEE: 129.

MALE 1 &
FEMALE: 129?

MALE 1: What year were you born? 18...?

MAGEE: 18 and 41

MALE 1: 1841?

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE: We hear your parents lived a long time too.

MAGEE: Yes, my mother did. Mother lived over 100 years.

MALE 1: How long did your daddy live til?

MAGEE: He only lived 108 years.

MALE 1: 108 years? Boy.

MALE 2: What's the secret, Sylvester? What's the secret to it?

MAGEE: Well, God...

MALE 2: How do you do it?

MAGEE: Well, the Lord...I reckon He just works on the [inaudible] I've been through some hardships.

MALE 2: You have? You remember much of that stuff?

MAGEE: In the slave times I was beaten up by my master.

MALE 1: You got beaten up by who?

MAGEE: My master.

MALE 1: By your master? Your master beat you up?

MAGEE: Yeah, Master Hugh Magee.

MALE 2: Was it rough in those days?

MAGEE: Oh, yeah. [inaudible] many a day.

MALE 1: Your master's name was Magee wasn't it?

MAGEE: Master Hugh Magee.

MALE 2: Where did y'all live back then?

MAGEE: Back up on Dry Creek.

MALE 2: Back over there? You lived around here all your life?

MAGEE: Up there, yes sir. Well I left and then I went in the war I stayed over there in Vicksburg.

MALE 1: In Vicksburg?

FEMALE: That's where we're from, Sylvester.

MALE 1: We came from Vicksburg to visit you.

MAGEE: Y'all come from a pretty town.

MALE 1: A pretty town?

MALE 2: You like Vicksburg.

MAGEE: Yes sir. I like that. That's a pretty town. Some good people [inaudible] Mr.

Ryan. Mr. Edmonds, the judge. They bring me some [inaudible] bring me this tobacco [inaudible] I feel sluggish when I ain't got none. Just don't know how I feel.

MALE 1: Have you lived in Mississippi all your life?

MAGEE: Well, no sir I stayed in Chicago at the end of the war. End of the war you know.

MALE 1: In Chicago?

MAGEE: After the war I left for five years.

MALE 2: Did you like it better up there? Did you like Chicago?

MAGEE: No, it was too cold.

MALE 2: Too cold for you?

MALE 1: Yeah.

MAGEE: Too cold. Too cold. All that [inaudible]

MALE 2: You like Mississippi better?

MALE 1: How come you're from Mississippi and you fought for the North?

MAGEE: I was bought up North.

FEMALE: You were bought...?

MALE 1: Oh

MAGEE: Master Hugh bought me and carried me up there.

MALE 1: Where did he take you? He took you up to Chicago?

MAGEE: North Carolina.

MALE 1: Oh, North Carolina?

MAGEE: Yeah.

MALE 2: How did you get up there? How did he take you up there?

MAGEE: [inaudible] Ride and some walk [unsure about this]

MALE 2: Walk?

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 1: Crack the whip on you. Made you move.

MAGEE: You'd move alright. I got sick on the way.

FEMALE: Oh you did?

MAGEE: Yes ma'am. Got sick on the way and [inaudible]

MALE 1: He let you stay somewhere while you were sick huh?

MAGEE: Yes sir. We come back [inaudible] I forget where.

MALE 1: Did you do any fighting in the war?

MAGEE: Yes, I got wounded too.

MALE 2: You got wounded?

MAGEE: Yes sir in Vicksburg.

MALE 1: You got wounded in Vicksburg? You did?

FEMALE: Sorry about that.

MALE 1: You fought for the North, right?

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 1: You were on the Yankee side. You got wounded in Vicksburg?

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 1: Where did you get wounded?

MALE 2: What I mean where?

MAGEE: [inaudible]

MALE 2: What a miney ball?

MAGEE: I guess a bullet.

FEMALE: A bullet?

MAGEE: I guess it was a bullet.

MALE 1: Sure felt like a bullet

MALE 2: How did they get it out of you? Did they take it out?

MAGEE: Yes sir. [inaudible]

MALE 2: Took it out of you?

MALE 1: Dr. Wells?

MAGEE: Yes sir.

FEMALE: Do you like life, Sylvester?

MAGEE: Ma'am?

FEMALE: How do you like life? What do you think about life? Living?

MAGEE: Oh I love to live.

FEMALE: You really do?

MAGEE: Yes ma'am [inaudible] gonna go away

MALE 1: 129

MAGEE: I'm proud to meet him when he comes

MALE 1: What, God?

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 1: Gonna come in a big white chariot.

MAGEE: Yes sir I'm gonna ride right there too.

MALE 1: Let's see. What else did you do during the war, Sylvester? What rank were you? Did you get a uniform? Did you have a uniform?

MAGEE: Some kind of old blue something.

MALE 1: They gave you some old uniform? Were you a private?

MAGEE: Yes

MALE 1: Were you a private?

MAGEE: Yes

MALE 1: What battles did you fight in? you fought in Gettysburg. I mean Vicksburg. Got wounded in Vicksburg.

MAGEE: Fought in the Civil War.

MALE 1: Civil?

MAGEE: Yes, Civil.

MALE 1: Civil I know. You fought in Vicksburg.

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 1: And what other wars?

FEMALE: Battles.

MALE 1: Oh I mean I'm sorry what other battles. I'm sorry. You didn't fight at Gettysburg did you?

MAGEE: Yes sir

MALE 1: You were up at Gettysburg too?

MALE 2: Pennsylvania?

MAGEE: Yes sir yes sir that's right. That's where I got [inaudible]

MALE 2: Got what?

MAGEE: [inaudible]

MALE 1: Oh. Did you kill a lot of Confederate soldiers? Did you shoot them?

MAGEE: [inaudible]

MALE 1: You took good care of them.

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 2: How many you think you killed?

MAGEE: I don't know.

MALE 2: Did you get any of them?

MAGEE: [inaudible] laying on the ground.

MALE 1: They're all laying on the ground

MAGEE: [inaudible] you've got to do some shooting though. Quick thing too.

MALE 2: Did that gun, did that rifle kick when you shot it? Did it kick?

MAGEE: No it never did kick [inaudible] get back up on my feet.

MALE 1: Really? Did it knock you down? It was so powerful [inaudible]

MAGEE: Knock you back
[inaudible]

MALE 2: You think the world has changed for the better, Sylvester?

MAGEE: Yes, it has changes for the better. Yes, it surely has.

FEMALE: Did you hear about the moon? The moon walk. About the men walking on the moon?

MAGEE: Yes ma'am. I hear them talking about it.

MALE 1: Do you believe it? Do you believe the U. S. has men up on the moon?

MAGEE: Well, I kind of believe what they are saying [inaudible] They was bound went there some [inaudible]
[inaudible]

MALE 1: A lot of people don't believe it.

MAGEE: Oh I believe it. They wouldn't have went up there. Uh huh. [inaudible] moon [inaudible] going there [inaudible] people don't believe nothing [inaudible] like the Lord having them to do.

MALE 1: Like the Lord having them to do.

MALE 2: Who do you think would have won the war, Sylvester, if they would have fought it today? If they were to have another civil war who do you think would win? You think the North would win again?

MAGEE: No sir I don't think the north would win

MALE 2: You think the South would beat them this time?

MAGEE: No. No.

MALE 2: How come? Why do you think that?

MAGEE: All white folks here.

MALE 2: Huh?

MAGEE: All white folks here.

MALE 2: Really they tough?

MAGEE: Yes sir. [inaudible]

MALE 2: Who had the best soldiers in the war?

MAGEE: Mr. John Ruben had them.

MALE 2: John Ruben?

MAGEE: Yes, that's my boy
[inaudible]

MALE 1: John Ruben? Was he a general?

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 1: How many generals did you get to see? Did you get to see many? I mean did you see Grant?

MAGEE: [inaudible] got to see Mr. Grant. [inaudible] see him

MALE 1: Let me shake your hand.

MAGEE: He come over there patted me on the head

MALE 1: He patted you on the head, huh?

MAGEE: [inaudible] old nigger [inaudible] right here where your [inaudible] when you gonna get home. I said [inaudible]

MALE 1: Did you vote for him when he ran for president?

MAGEE: No sir [inaudible]

MALE 1: Right in there with him

MAGEE: Was a good man

MALE 1: I know. I know he was a good man. They said he drank a lot. Did he drink a lot?

MAGEE: [inaudible] Yeah, he drank

MALE 1: He drank?

MAGEE: Give you a drink

FEMALE: Do you like to drink, Sylvester? We were going to bring you some wine but we didn't think you would like it.

MAGEE: Oh I drink [inaudible]

MALE 1: Probably like wine

MAGEE: What?

MALE 1: [inaudible] said you didn't like wine

MAGEE: Who?

MALE 1: He did

MAGEE: He don't know

MALE 1: Think he knows it's bad for you

FEMALE: He wants to keep you around for a little while.

MAGEE: Yes ma'am. Yes ma'am. [inaudible] brought me a drink the other day. Brought me a bottle [inaudible] back over there and I'll take me a good

swig and lay down [inaudible] come out and walk around and go back and hit it again. [inaudible] No. Been blessed, though.

MALE 1: You been blessed?

MAGEE: Yes sir. I have been blessed.

MALE 1: I guess you have to have lived 129 years.

MAGEE: That's right.

MALE 2: Not many people live that long

MAGEE: No sir

FEMALE: Why have...how come you think you have lived that long, Sylvester?

MAGEE: My master told me [inaudible] sitting down talking to me one night. Said you'll be here a long, long years behind me.

MALE 1: Long, long years

MAGEE: I said Master, why you say that? Because you're an old [inaudible] said you're just a blessing the most kindest [inaudible] God gonna keep you here a long time. [inaudible] that's just what he said. I had one good master. One good and I had one cruel one. That man is cruelest cruel. He'll hit you just to be looking at you.

MALE 1: Your master?

MAGEE: Yes, sir. My master.

MALE 1: Was he the one that made you fight in the war? Did he make you go?

MAGEE: Yes sir. I had to go with him.

MALE 1: Oh you went with him? He was going to kill you if you didn't. He said you come too.

MAGEE: He was going to kill me if I didn't.

MALE 1: He was going to kill you if you didn't. He said you come too.

MAGEE: Yes sir. He said you got to go over there and let them men shoot you down. Shooting down? I said shoot me down? Yeah we going to shoot a lot of them [inaudible] get there [inaudible]

MALE 1: Oh he wanted them to shoot you, huh?

MAGEE: Yes sir. I was dodging there and the Good Lord bless me. Dodging around there.

MALE 1: He probably got shot but you didn't.

MAGEE: No, he got shot. I know he got shot.

MALE 1: Oh he got shot? They killed him? He got killed? Your master got killed.

MAGEE: [inaudible] sure was a good man.

MALE 2: What did you do after they freed the slaves? Where did you go?

MAGEE: I come on back down home. [inaudible] master Hugh's place. Stayed down there.

MALE 2: Different man

MAGEE: Yes sir. Yes sir.

MALE 1: Burned down. Burned it down.

MALE 2: Life better for you then?

MAGEE: Yes sir. In a way it was. [inaudible] send the dogs out [inaudible] running around at night [inaudible] go get me a piece of bread. [inaudible] go get that bread and bring it to me. I love that old dog.

MALE 2: How long did he live?

MAGEE: That dog? He lived six years.

MALE 1: Six years?

MAGEE: Yes sir. [inaudible] it was on a Wednesday. Wednesday, Fourth of July. The last [inaudible]

MALE 2: You did?

MAGEE: That dog had more sense than a person. Old master he would get on me and get to whipping me and that dog would run in there and bite him.

MALE 2: Really?

MAGEE: Yeah he'd bite him

MALE 2: You had a good friend.

MAGEE: Yes sir. Don't train your dog to bite. I said no sir. No sir. I didn't train him to bite. Yes you did. I said no sir. [inaudible] that dog to bite. He'd sure bite him. [inaudible]

MALE 2: Did you live with your master when you came back?

MALE 1: Had to get a new master. Your old master got shot.

MAGEE: No sir. He got killed.

MALE 1: Where? At Gettysburg?

MAGEE: [inaudible] on the other side of Vicksburg. [inaudible]

MALE 1: The other side of Vicksburg. So then you're on your own? Did you take his uniform?

MAGEE: [inaudible] took it.

MALE 1: Not only did you outlive the last confederate soldier by ten years but you may very well be the oldest man in the United States.

MAGEE: That's right.

MALE 1: You think are?

MAGEE: That's what they tell me. I don't know.

MALE 1: That's what they tell you?

MALE 2: Did they prove how old you were?

MAGEE: [inaudible]

MALE 2: Did they prove it? Did they find any kind of birth certificate or anything?

MAGEE: [inaudible] wasn't no trouble to get it. [inaudible] Vicksburg found out [inaudible]

MALE 1: The year you were born? They found out in Vicksburg? Because you had it written down in a Bible.

MAGEE: Yes sir. They had it.

MALE 1: What happened to your Bible? [inaudible] down in your cabin.

MAGEE: No my mother [inaudible] the last time I seen it. [inaudible] my mother's house. She's dead and I don't know where the Bible is. [inaudible]

MALE 1: You get a lot of visitors, Sylvester? A lot of people come to see you?

MAGEE: Yes sir. There's a lot of them come to see me.

MALE 1: Even though you run all over the place and it's hard to find you they still do find you.

MAGEE: Yes, yes sir. [inaudible] and I tell anybody you come down home. They stayed up there around a week there with me.

MALE 1: They stayed there a week?

MAGEE: Magee. Stayed there a week with me. [inaudible] Master Hugh's son. Old Master Hugh was my master. Yes sir, Master Hugh Magee. [inaudible] all the time beating on him. Then Luther and Johnny [inaudible] get out there and work and then wouldn't be so sore..

MALE 1: Oh your master kept beating you and said get out there and work so you wouldn't be sore?

MAGEE: He didn't care.

MALE 2: What kind of work did you do?

MAGEE: Worked in the field and cutting logs

MALE 2: Did they have the house servants too?

MAGEE: Yes sir they did.

MALE 2: Did you want to be one of them? Would you rather be one of them?

MAGEE: Rather been one of them than been where I was.

FEMALE: When's your birthday, Sylvester?

MAGEE: 29th of May.

ALL: 29th of May?

MALE 1: Celebrate it on Memorial Day

MAGEE: Yes sir, yes sir.

MALE 1: National holiday. A big holiday for you.

MAGEE: 129 a hundred and some odd years old

MALE 2: How long you think you're gonna live, Sylvester? 150? 160?

MAGEE: I don't know. [inaudible] mighty fast [inaudible]

MALE 1: We understand you get birthday cards from the President of the United States. Is this true?

MAGEE: No sir. I used to get them often. I haven't got none lately.

MALE 1: Lyndon B. Johnson sent you one.

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 1: Lyndon Johnson sent you one?

MAGEE: That's a good man.

MALE 1: Good man? Why, because he sent you a birthday card?

MAGEE: Yes sir. He was good anyhow. I know him from way back yonder. He's a good old boy.

MALE 1: You known him when he was a little boy.

MAGEE: Yes, sir.

FEMALE: Where did you know him, Sylvester?

MAGEE: Back up there [inaudible] Mt. Carmel.

MALE 1: Mount Carmel?

MAGEE: Near Mount Carmel.

MALE 1: Did he live in Mississippi?

MAGEE: He lived in Mississippi. He was born in Mississippi.

MALE 1: he was? Lyndon B. Johnson? The old president?
[inaudible]

MALE 1: How about your married life, Sylvester? Do you like women?

MAGEE: Well I got one [inaudible] one sweet wife

MALE 1: Six wives?

MAGEE: One wife.

MALE 1: Oh one wife?

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 1: Did you like her?

MAGEE: Yes sir I loved my wife

MALE 2: How long did she live?

MAGEE: She lived 5 years.

FEMALE: 5 years after you married her?

MAGEE: Yes ma'am.

FEMALE: That's all? You never married again?

MAGEE: No ma'am.

MALE 1: You're through with women. Huh Sylvester?

MAGEE: [inaudible] I tell you I know I'll not find nothing like her. [inaudible] real lady. Yes sir. She didn't [inaudible]

MALE 1: Is she in heaven now?

MAGEE: Sir?

MALE 1: Is she in heaven now?

MAGEE: That's where she told me she was going. That's where she told me she was

going. I took her word for it. [inaudible] said you come on and meet me. I told her I'd be there. [inaudible] I told her too.

- FEMALE: You've been waiting a long time, huh?
- MAGEE: Yes ma'am. Yes ma'am. God's gonna let us get together one day. That's true. [inaudible] sit down and [inaudible] I had a good wife though. I had a sweet wife. Good [inaudible] Christian too. [inaudible] Her daddy used to tell me [inaudible] best young. He said "How did you get—how did you get" [inaudible] Praise God. [inaudible] I told God. [inaudible] I'll tell you one thing, he said, you got my best young 'un. Yes sir. I know it too. I know it. [inaudible] them girls [inaudible] the whole country. Master [inaudible]
- MALE 1: You live here with your daughter, Sylvester? Is this your daughter?
- MAGEE: Yes this here's my baby.
- MALE 1: She's your baby? How old is she? She must be pretty old herself, huh?
- MAGEE: About 40 [inaudible]
- MALE 1: About 40? she must have been your baby when you were about 80
- MAGEE: Yes sir.
- MALE 1: When you were 80 she was your baby.
- MAGEE: Yes sir.
- MALE 1: Does she work in town? Does she have a job?
- MAGEE: Yes sir. She works somewhere up there.
- MALE 1: Somewhere up there?
- MAGEE: Yes sir. [inaudible] good, too.
- MALE 1: She is good to you?
- MAGEE: Yes sir. She's a good young 'un.
- MALE 2: Where were your parents from, Sylvester?
- MAGEE: They're from...Mother was born back up yonder in Dry Creek...back up yonder in some woods. My mother and all them come up on Dry Creek. [inaudible] Master Hugh bought my mother and me too.

MALE 2: He bought both of y'all?

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 2: Did he ever sell y'all again?

MAGEE: No sir. The Lord blessed us. [inaudible]

MALE 2: He did?

MAGEE: Master Hugh was mean.

MALE 2: Did they...did they sell...did they break up families back then? Did your master sell...break up the families?

MAGEE: Yes sir. Yes sir. He didn't care about how many was in the family neither. He'd sure take them when he got ready.

MALE 1: Do you think you'll see him in heaven?

MAGEE: No sir, I don't reckon I'll...

MALE 1: Don't think so.

FEMALE: Hope not.

MAGEE: [inaudible]

MALE 1: I'm sure God must have the whip and beat him with it.

MAGEE: [inaudible]

FEMALE: Does this hot weather bother you much, Sylvester?

MAGEE: No ma'am.

FEMALE: It used to huh?

MAGEE: Yes ma'am. Yes ma'am. [inaudible] all up and down [inaudible] railroad lines. [inaudible] be so hot. [inaudible] I'm hotter. [inaudible] after work. Old boys would come along and tell me Come on there, little man. I'd get too. One thing about it [inaudible] We sure did. He'd work [inaudible] I'd work the field. I'd work. [inaudible] tie him to a tree and then [inaudible] he out there and guard the tree so we wouldn't get a whipping [inaudible]

MALE 2: Master's whip?

MAGEE: Yeah.

MALE 2: How come they whip?

MALE 1: Let me shake your hand while she's taking the picture. Thank you.

MAGEE: Yes sir. [inaudible]

MALE 1: What do you do for exercise, Sylvester? Do you go out and walk around?

MAGEE: Huh?

MALE 1: ...or do you just sit here on the porch and...

MAGEE: No I walk around the house. [inaudible]

MALE 1: Do you like sports, Sylvester?

MAGEE: Sir?

MALE 1: Do you like sports? Football or baseball?

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 1: That kind of thing?

MAGEE: I love to see them.

MALE 1: You love to see them?

FEMALE: Do you like television? Do you watch television much?

MAGEE: Yes ma'am. Sometimes sitting up there maybe all night.

MALE 1: Maybe all night. You just saw the...you saw the space launch on TV then?

MAGEE: Yes sir. Yes sir.

MALE 1: Saw the space men on TV?

MAGEE: There's some tough people on there isn't it? Tough people.

MALE 1: I know.

MAGEE: [inaudible] killed. That killing part it scares me.

MALE 1: I understand they have you on television sometimes.

MAGEE: Sir?

MALE 1: They have you on television sometimes, don't they? They come put you on television?

MAGEE: No sir. They ain't yet.

MALE 1: They used to didn't they?

MAGEE: Yes sir. Yes sir.

MALE 1: On your birthday. They'd put you on TV?

MAGEE: Yes sir. Back up yonder.

MALE 1: Back up yonder? In Jackson?

MAGEE: [inaudible]

MALE 1: Did you ever go to New Orleans?

MAGEE: Been [inaudible] down this and that and back up [inaudible]

MALE 1: Everywhere down that road and everywhere up north.

MAGEE: [inaudible] Jones. [inaudible] Jones carried me all the way up to New York. Washington D. C. and all through there.

MALE 1: Washing ton D. C. too.

MAGEE: Yes sir. Mr. Jones got the money [inaudible]

MALE 1: How do you travel? Do you take a bus when you go from Inverness to Columbia and Hattiesburg?

MAGEE: Went in an airplane when I went up North.

MALE 1: Boy. Went in an airplane.

MAGEE: [inaudible] seen part of this world.

MALE 1: Seen some parts of this world, huh?

MAGEE: [inaudible] dead though

MALE 1: I guess in a hundred and 29 years you get to do a lot of travelling.

MAGEE: Yes sir. Yes sir. I've seen things I never thought I'd see.

MALE 1: You've seen things you never thought you'd see.

MALE 2: You think...you think soldiers... you think Grant would believe they landed men on the moon? What do you think he'd say to that?

MALE 1: If Grant were here today.

MAGEE: What?

MALE 1: If General Grant were here today would he believe there were men up on the moon?

MAGEE: He might believe it. Do you believe it?

MALE 1: Do I believe it? Oh, I believe it. Yes.

MAGEE: How'd they get up there?

MALE 1: How'd they get up there? They got a big rocket ship.

MAGEE: They must have something to go up there in case it gets cold up there.

FEMALE: What's your favorite thing to eat?

MAGEE: [inaudible]

MALE 1: Chewing tobacco.

MAGEE: Cake.

FEMALE: What?

MAGEE: Cake.

FEMALE: Cake?

MAGEE: Cake and peas. [inaudible]

[inaudible]

MALE 1: Shake his hand. [inaudible] Sylvester likes to get his picture taken.

MAGEE: They took it so much.

FEMALE: Did you ever see any of the ones they took?

MAGEE: Yes ma'am. Yes ma'am. Yes ma'am.

MALE 1: Smile, Sylvester.

FEMALE: That's good. I think we're gonna get a little rain. Don't you?

MAGEE: Yes ma'am. Hope it ain't gonna be no bad weather.

MALE 1: You like all these animals?

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 1: You got cats, dogs...

MAGEE: They can keep me up all night and day.

MALE 1: Oh they keep you up at all night, huh? Do you have to go feed them?

MAGEE: [inaudible] anybody come around [inaudible] I'll be laying in bed hearing them having a time out there. Sure let you know when anybody comes around.

MALE 1: Oh, the dog does?

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 1: When somebody comes around.

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 1: He didn't bark when we came.

MAGEE: That wasn't night.

MALE 1 &
FEMALE: Oh at night.

MAGEE: Night.

FEMALE: What time do you get up in the morning?

MAGEE: Sometimes I get up about 10. Sometimes about 11.

MALE 1: 10 or 11?

MAGEE: Yes sir. Yes sir.

FEMALE: Stay up late and get up late, huh?

MAGEE: Yes ma'am. Yes ma'am. Yes ma'am.

MALE 1: Watch TV all night. Watching television.

MAGEE: [inaudible] lay down. [inaudible] like it used to. [inaudible]

FEMALE: How are your eyes? Do you need any glasses?

MAGEE: I've been needing glasses a long time.

MALE 1: You go see the doctor about it?

MAGEE: No sir I never been and seen him.

MALE 1: No does it work? Does that eye work?

MAGEE: A little bit.

MALE 1: You can still see a little bit.

MAGEE: A little bit.

MALE 1: Just a little bit.

MAGEE: Just that one

MALE 1: As long as this one works you're ok.

MAGEE: [inaudible] see all right. They're old. These eyes are old.

MALE 1: These eyes are old.

FEMALE: They are. They're as old as you are.

MALE 1: After 129 years they're tired of seeing the world. They want to close and go to sleep.

MAGEE: The Lord won't close them until I get there. [inaudible] be led by them. [inaudible] that's true. But my baby [inaudible] that's my son-in-law.

MALE 1: That's your son-in-law? Is he calling you?

MAGEE: He's calling some of the children.

MALE 1: He's calling some of the children? Did he name one of his kids after you? Is one of his kids named Sylvester?

MAGEE: No I don't think so. My other boy [inaudible] up yonder.

MALE 1: Grandson?

MAGEE: Yes, he has a young 'un named after me.

MALE 1: Named Sylvester?

FEMALE: How many children did you have, Sylvester?

MALE 1: Just one?

MAGEE: 14

MALE 1: 14

MALE 2: How many wives did you have? One wife?

MAGEE: Yes sir, one.

MALE 1: One wife had 14 children?

MAGEE: Yes sir. All of them dead.

MALE 1: All dead?

MAGEE: All of them's dead.

MALE 1: All of them dead.

FEMALE: Is this your granddaughter's house here?

MAGEE: Yes ma'am. This is my granddaughter's house here.

MALE 1: Granddaughter's house. She's your baby.

MAGEE: This one my baby

MALE 1: Your baby?

MAGEE: This is my baby.

FEMALE: You're great-grandfather then, huh?

MAGEE: yes ma'am. [inaudible]

[break in tape]

MAGEE: [inaudible]

MALE 1: Your mother raised you to work, huh?

MAGEE: Yes sir. Yes sir.

MALE 1: And that's your secret of success?

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 1: That's what made you live so long.

MAGEE: Yes sir. Old Master Hugh would tell anybody if he was living today [inaudible] the best worker he had.

MALE 1: The best worker lives the longest.

MAGEE: Yes sir. I outlived all the rest of them.

MALE 1: You outlived all the rest of them, huh?

MAGEE: I ain't bragging but I know the Lord has let me live.

MALE 1: The Lord let you live.

MAGEE: [inaudible] healthy looking than I was. Always have been weasly looking. Yes sir.

FEMALE: Weak looking?

MAGEE: Weasly—you know, poor.

FEMALE: Skinny.

MAGEE: Yes ma'am.

FEMALE: Like me.

MAGEE: Yes ma'am. Poor. I look at myself sometimes and think I'm poor enough to be done dead, but the Good Lord let me sit right here. Ain't got no arm [inaudible]

MALE 1: At least your hands still work. Can you write?

MAGEE: No sir, I can't write. Never went to school.

FEMALE: Aren't you glad?

MAGEE: Yes ma'am I'm glad because back in yonder days I wouldn't have got nothing nohow.

MALE 1: We can teach you to write your name if you want. You want to learn how to write your name?

MAGEE: I would love to learn. [inaudible] writing. Write a letter one day.

MALE 1: Write a letter someday?

MAGEE: Yes sir writing one day.

MALE 1: Can you hold a pen?

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 1: Show you how to write your name. If you really want to know. Here, hold this.

MAGEE: I'd sure love to learn.

MALE 1: Oops. Here, I'll help you. Ok. L-V-E-S-T-E-R. That's how you write Sylvester.

MAGEE: Yes sir. Yes sir.

MALE 1: Then M-A-G-E-E. Sylvester Magee—and you wrote it! You wrote it! See, you can write.

MAGEE: [inaudible] I'm gonna write my own name.

MALE 1: You're gonna write your own name?

MAGEE: Don't know how I wrote it but [inaudible] holding my hand writing.

MALE 1: Somebody always has to hold your hand. I'll write it here.

MAGEE: Yes sir. Thank you

MALE 1: And now when you want you can practice. You can look at this and try to do what...

FEMALE: Do you have a pen?

MALE 1: Oh, he can take the pen M-A-G-E-E. That says Sylvester. That's your first name. that says Magee.

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 1: So I'll give you this.

MAGEE: Thank you good master.

MALE 1: Ok and a pen and you can practice when you want to. See if you can do it yourself someday.

MAGEE: When my daughter come I'm gonna get her to...

MALE 1: What?

MAGEE: ...get her to get me another piece of paper and practice writing

MALE 1: Get you another piece of paper?

MAGEE: I'll get me another piece and when she comes she'll show me how to [inaudible]

MALE 1: Can you do that?

MAGEE: [inaudible] I know. I've got to get it right first.

MALE 1: K. Here this will help. Put this behind. So. Ok. That'll give you something to write on anyway. Ok.

MAGEE: [inaudible] how to make that...

MALE 1: Ok. Ok, now go this way. Go that way. And now go down. You do it—you

do it like the famous people do. All famous people, they go to them and ask them to write their names for them. You do it real well.

MAGEE: I can't see. I can't half see.

FEMALE: That's right. Not too much sun.

MAGEE: Thanks to the good Lord. I might keep this...

MALE 1: Aww. You're straining your eyes? Ok.

FEMALE: Don't do it too much or you'll strain your eyes.

MAGEE: Yes, ma'am. It will sure strain them.

FEMALE: That's probably why your eyes last so long, Sylvester, because you never had to read.

[inaudible background]

MAGEE: Well, I'm gonna...

MALE 1: I think it's raining.

MAGEE: I'm gonna put this up until the baby comes and show her that I'm writing.

MALE 1: Does she know how to write? Does your baby know how to write?

MAGEE: Yes. Yes sir.

MALE 1: She can help you too.

MAGEE: Yes sir. She sure could. Sure could.

MALE 1: She'll teach you and then you'll be just like the professionals and write real good. You can write books. Write all about the Civil War.

MAGEE: Yes sir. I'm gonna sure get her to do that.

MALE 1: Ok. Well, it's starting to rain.

MAGEE: I sure thank you for doing this and learning me this.

MALE 1: Ok, well we just hope you can learn it and just practice that's all you have to do is practice.

FEMALE: We sure enjoyed it.

MALE 2: [inaudible]

MAGEE: I'm gonna sure practice. I'll go to town and buy some paper and I'll sure practice. [inaudible]

MALE 1: We'll give you some more. Wait, I think we have some more sheets here.

MAGEE: [inaudible] be up there in town [inaudible] I'm gonna sit down and...

MALE 1: Here's some more.

MAGEE: Thank you, good master.

MALE 1: Ok.

FEMALE: Do you go to town much, Sylvester?

MAGEE: Ma'am?

FEMALE: Do you get to go into town much?

MAGEE: Yes ma'am I get up there pretty often. Yes ma'am.

FEMALE: That's good.

MAGEE: My baby will carry me up there whenever I get ready.

FEMALE: What would you like to buy if you had a lot of lot of money?

MALE 1: A lot of lot of money?

MAGEE: A lot of lot of money I'd eat up [inaudible]

MALE 1: You'd eat what you'd want? You'd go buy your master and beat him, huh?

MAGEE: Yes. Yes sir. Yes sir.

FEMALE: He's still alive?

MALE 1: No. His master? His master got killed at Gettysburg.

MAGEE: [inaudible] get me some watermelon.

FEMALE: You like watermelon?

MAGEE: Yes ma'am, I'd buy me a watermelon. I ain't gonna tell you I'd buy it and sit up there in that town and let them eat it. I'd bring my watermelon out there and sit down...

FEMALE: Eat the whole thing.

MAGEE: Yes ma'am. I'd eat it. If I didn't eat it, I'd bring it home. It be eaten when I got here.

FEMALE: Where do you live most of the time?

MAGEE: I stay here with my baby.

FEMALE: Stay here most of the time?

MALE 1: In Columbia. You used to stay in Hattiesburg.

MAGEE: Yes sir. I used to stay in Hattiesburg. Over there.

MALE 1: What about Magnolia? Did you stay in Magnolia?

MAGEE: In Magnolia. A good long...

MALE 1: Inverness? Inverness?

MAGEE: Yes sir. Yes sir.

MALE 1: You stayed there?

MAGEE: Yes sir. Lord, I'm telling you. They was good to me in Magnolia.

[inaudible background]

MAGEE: I sure thank you, master for learning me—this is your pencil.

MALE 1: No, no, no. That's yours. I gave it to you to practice with.

MAGEE: Thank you. Thank you. [inaudible]

MALE 1: [inaudible] in your pocket. There it is. Ok.

MAGEE: Thank you, good master.

MALE 1: Ok. Sylvester, we're gonna go now because it's raining and we have to go home. But...

MAGEE: I sure thank you.

Male: We sure enjoyed talking to you and thank you very much for letting us talk to you.

FEMALE: It's nice to have met you.

MAGEE: Yes ma'am. I'm gonna pray for y'all. That God will bless y'all.

MALE 1: Ok. Thank you.

FEMALE: We'll pray for you, too.

MALE 1: It's good to have you pray for us.

MAGEE: Come and learning me how to go this way.

MALE 1: How to go that way. Learn you how to write.

MAGEE: I'm sure gonna pray to God and ask God to bless you right on.

MALE 1: Ok. Well, thank you, Sylvester.

MAGEE: Yes sir, I believe in living for the Lord Jesus best I know how. I get to thinking sometimes. Laying in this bed I'll be done. Master, I've had a hard road to travel in my life. I had a mean, mean master.

MALE 1: Mean, mean master. You'll never forget that, huh?

MAGEE: No, sir.

MALE 1: That's probably why you remember back that far so well.

MAGEE: [inaudible] big scar on me right there, that's huge, but God blessed me and took care of me. I had to hop around there a good long while before I got well, but I had to work just the same. He's dead and gone. He told me [inaudible] I want you to forgive me.

MALE 1: Is that what he said? He said he wants you to forgive him? Are you going to forgive him?

MAGEE: Yes sir. I forgive him.

MALE 1: You forgave him? That's good of you, Sylvester.

MAGEE: I gave it to the Lord.

MALE 1: God will remember that.

MAGEE: I gave it to the Lord. I said Lord, forgive him for he knows not what he's done. Yes sir.

MALE 1: You know all that Bible, huh? You know the Bible.

MAGEE: Yes sir. He said to me, "Sylvester, you sure are a good man." I said "Master Hugh, I says I'm gonna be honest with you, I didn't never know nothing but work." And I said "That's all that I can do and I have to be a good man because I like to live and eat in this world and I don't live out there if I don't do things just right you'll starve me." He will. I missed many a meal.

MALE 1: If you don't do things right, you'll starve, huh? Missed them, huh?

MAGEE: Missed many a meal.

MALE 1: Missed the big whip.

MAGEE: Yes sir. He sure...but God and him [inaudible] him and the Good Lord [inaudible] I sure gonna try to mark this here up. Get what I can.

MALE 1: Get those letters.

MAGEE: Get my letters on here.

MALE 1: And then when people come and ask you for your autograph and ask you to write your name you can say "Sure."

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 1: And then do it real fast and surprise them. Be a big surprise.

MAGEE: I'll get right down here. Get this here and [inaudible] that name there. Yes sir. I ain't [inaudible] to do nothing like that.

MALE 1: It is a privilege isn't it? You can write letters to people too.

MAGEE: Yes.

MALE 1: Write a letter to President Nixon.

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 1: Say you're running the country the wrong way or something.

MAGEE: Yes sir. He'd bless me out. I'd be over here and he'd come over here and [inaudible] master you ain't treating the people right.

MALE 1: Oh, Nixon?

MAGEE: Yes. [inaudible] master ain't treating us right. I'm down here hungry and you're up there taking everything.

MALE 1: Oh, that's your master.

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 1: Ain't treating the people right.

MAGEE: He'd bless me out. [inaudible] hard about it. Way over here [inaudible] buy me nothing to eat. [inaudible] give me something. He's good but [inaudible] like it is. What he believes in he's gonna do that.

MALE 1: If he believes it he'll do it.

MAGEE: Ain't be no need in trying to make him do it. He'll get contrary and won't do it. Yes sir, he will. He's good in a way. I [inaudible] yes sir.

MALE 1: Well, Sylvester, we sure enjoyed talking to a famous person like you. It's not every day we get to see a famous person.

MAGEE: No sir. No sir.

MALE 1: You are famous.

MAGEE: I'm thanking God for y'all coming. I thank the Lord. I enjoy it.

MALE 1: Next time when we come we'll teach you how to write some more. If we come again we'll bring a watermelon, too.

MAGEE: Thank you, good master.

MALE 1: Instead of chewing tobacco we'll bring a watermelon.

MAGEE: Oh, Lord.

MALE 1: You like the hat though, huh?

MAGEE: Yes sir. [inaudible] that chewing tobacco. I live off it.

FEMALE: You like it better than watermelon?

MAGEE: Yes ma'am. Yes ma'am I'm gonna sit down there and eat that watermelon. Enjoy my life and be happy. [inaudible]

MALE 1: Have teeth?

MAGEE: Huh?

MALE 1: You still have teeth?

MAGEE: I ain't got no teeth.

MALE 1: Well you don't.

FEMALE: No teeth?

MALE 1: How do you chew tobacco?

FEMALE: How do you chew tobacco?

MAGEE: These old gums done got tough so you can chew with them.

FEMALE: Oh! You have no teeth at all?

MAGEE: Ain't got none.

MALE 1: All gone away in 129 years.

MAGEE: Yes sir. Been gone a long time.

FEMALE: How do you chew your food? Just with your gums?

MAGEE: Yes ma'am. Chew on this side.

MALE 1: Chew on that side, huh?

MAGEE: Yes sir. And I can chew it up too.

MALE 1: You swallow it or you spit it all out?

MAGEE: I chew it up.

MALE 1: Oh.

MAGEE: Swallow it.

MALE 1: Swallow it. You don't like it.

MAGEE: Yes sir. [inaudible]

FEMALE: His food.

MALE 1: Food? Oh. We thought you were talking about your tobacco. We thought you chewed your tobacco and swallowed it.

MAGEE: No sir. I was talking about something to eat.

MALE 1: You spit that out, huh?

MAGEE: Yes sir. I spit that tobacco out.

MALE 2: That doesn't go down too easy, does it?

MAGEE: Yes sir. No sir, it'll burn you up down in there.

MALE 1: Burn you up down there.

MAGEE: Sometimes I make the mistake and swallow it and there I'll be for a while.

MALE 1: Oh, you'll be sick for a while?

MAGEE: Yes sir. It do. Well I'm glad by the help of the Lord. God sent me somebody here so I can make me some marks. I'm gonna get on it.

MALE 1: You're going to learn how to write, Sylvester.

MAGEE: Yes sir.

MALE 1: Next time we come you'll be an expert, huh?

MAGEE: I hope and trust in the Lord that I can learn.

MALE 1: Ask your baby. She'll do it. Ask your granddaughter.

MAGEE: [inaudible]

FEMALE: You got your pen, Sylvester? Don't lose it.

MALE 1: Yeah, he's got it. It's in his pocket.

FEMALE: Oh, ok.

MAGEE: That's y'all's pencil, ain't it?

FEMALE: No, it's for you.

MALE 1: For you to practice with.

MAGEE: Thank you, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am.

FEMALE: Don't forget where it is.

MAGEE: Got me a sporty pencil. Old big shot!

MALE 1: Big shot.

MAGEE: Old big shot. Yes sir. Now [inaudible] Now I've got to go back over here and look at this.

MALE 1: He's got it. Don't worry. There it is.

MAGEE: There it is.

MALE 1: You go show it to your granddaughter and you say you did that.

FEMALE: Tell her you did that.

MALE 1: I did that. I wrote that.

MAGEE: I'm gonna tell her. I'll say now, look. You already wrote down for me to write. You ain't got to do that. Now come on and do something with this here. Show me that [inaudible]

MALE 1: What's that say? What's that one?

MAGEE: That's [inaudible] ain't it?

MALE 1: Sylvester. And what's this one say?

MAGEE: M-C double E.

MALE 1: M-C double E.

FEMALE: [inaudible]

MAGEE: S-I-L-V-E-S Sylvester.

MALE 1: S-Y-L-V-E-S-T-E-R

MAGEE: Sylvester

MALE 1: S-Y-L-V-E-S-T-E-R. MAGEE: M-A-G-E-E

MAGEE: Yes sir. Yes sir.

MALE 1: But you spell it M-C.

MAGEE: I got it now.

MALE 1: You got it?

MAGEE: I got it now. I got it now.

MALE 1: That's it. You got it alright, Sylvester.

MAGEE: I never had a [inaudible] go to no school or nothing.

MALE 1: Well, your master didn't let you, huh? He wanted you to go work out in the fields rather than learn to read or write.

MAGEE: No sir. [inaudible] cutting bushes and briars...

MALE 1: Out in the bushes.

MAGEE: ...scraping cotton, hoeing corn. Lord knows I got to make a mark on this something this morning. Yes sir.

MALE 1: Age 129.

FEMALE: You sit out on this front porch all day?

MAGEE: Ma'am?

FEMALE: Do you sit out on this front porch all day?

MAGEE: Yes ma'am. Sometimes I do, yes ma'am.

MALE 1: Sometimes he goes for a walk.

MAGEE: I get up and walk around out in the...

FEMALE: Oh. That's good. Remember that exercise is what's kept you alive so long.

MAGEE: Yes ma'am. Yes ma'am.

MALE 1: Hard work. Hard work walking around.

MAGEE: Lord, if anybody's worked hard in this world, I have. Anybody say I'm the hardest worker. My mother and all them. My people. Ain't got nothing. [inaudible] I couldn't help myself. [inaudible] know good and better [inaudible] God's gonna pay them at the end.

FEMALE: That's right.

MALE 1: God's gonna pay them at the end.

MAGEE: Yes sir. Old Mister [inaudible] that died over yonder [inaudible] I didn't know what he wanted. Got over there and he told me, "Sylvester, I'm glad to see you this morning. I worked you and didn't pay you. I declare [inaudible] every night and every day." I said Well, Mr. Odom [inaudible]. He said "You don't know that, Sylvester." I said, yes, sir I do.

MALE 1: You know he's not going to give you anything.

MAGEE: [inaudible] give me five dollars.

FEMALE: Five dollars. How long did you work for him?

MAGEE: Four years.

FEMALE: Four years?

END OF RECORDING